#AFGHANWOMENOSLO

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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Messages from Oslo

Summary Report

Chaired by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, US Department of State, Afghan Women's Network, Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo.

The Oslo Symposium on "Women's Rights and Empowerment in Afghanistan" gathered senior representatives of the Afghan government, parliament, and civil society, together with representatives of 32 governments, multilateral organizations and international civil society organizations. The symposium highlighted Afghanistan's achievements over the past 13 years, with international support, identified challenges for sustaining progress, and advanced recommendations on how to address the issues. This document summarizes main messages.

The main message to come out of the Oslo Symposium was the mutual commitment by Afghanistan's new Government of National Unity, Afghan civil society and international partners take decisive action to advance gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment.

Achievements

There has been great progress in the empowerment of women in Afghanistan over the past 13 years. The symposium took note in particular of the following legal and policy achievements:

- The codification of women's rights in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
- The Afghan Government's National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan 2008-18 (NAP)
- The Afghan Government's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325)
- The commitment of Afghanistan's new Unity Government to prioritize women's rights and empowerment
- The Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women

The symposium also noted that practical measures in a number of areas have yielded results, such as the election of women to the Afghan parliament and provincial councils, greater participation of women in the labor market, increased enrolment of girls in school and reduction of maternal and child mortality.

The symposium underscored that progress remains partial and fragile, with Afghanistan still a challenging place to be a woman. Participants agreed that advancing women is not only a responsibility of Afghanistan, but also a necessity for peace and development. The symposium called for action to implement commitments and invest in results for women and girls.

Recommendations

The discussions brought forth recommendations in the areas of governance, human rights, justice, security, education and economy:

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Increased participation of women is essential. Maintain and develop a quota system for elections that ensures solid women's representation at all levels of government, until quotas no longer are necessary. Consider increasing the quota for parliament above 25%.

Recently lawmakers reduced the quota to 5% for provincial councils and 0% for district councils. In order to ensure women's representation in the planned process of Constitutional reform, amendments to re-instate higher quotas for provincial and district councils will be critical.

Increase women's civic education as a means to ensure that elected officials represent their constituencies and prioritize public needs and service delivery.

Since the level of women employed in the government administration and security sector remains low, implement affirmative action policies with a threshold level of 33% and a timeline.

Broad alliances in politics, civil society and beyond are most effective at promoting women's issues; mobilizing male constituencies is important.

Fund, implement and monitor the national action plans for UNSRC 1325 and Women's Affairs.

Women's concerns and women's representation are pivotal in any peace process. Women should participate directly in all channels of negotiation. Peace talks also should be rooted in consultative processes with civil society.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW

Implement fully Afghanistan's national and international commitments to ensure equal rights, end discrimination and prevent violence against women.

Safeguard the articles of the Constitution on women's rights and human rights in the constitutional reform process.

Ensure the fair and legal treatment of women before the law.

Ensure women access to formal justice system. Remove discrepancies in laws and regulations. Meet cases of violence and discrimination with distinct legal reactions, not impunity.

Increase application and monitoring of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women throughout the system.

Strengthen capacity and competence of the formal legal system to deal with cases of gender-based violence. Develop monitoring of the outcome of all cases. Increase legal aid to women. Provide medical and psychosocial treatment as well as economic compensation for victims.

To fight discrimination, bring the judicial system and legislation into compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Provide specialized legal aid to female detainees, also outside major cities.

The lack of capacity and integrity of the justice system affects all citizens. Justice sector reform is a necessity to safeguard women's rights and protect against violence and discrimination.

It is critical for women, at home and as students and professionals, to feel safe. Strengthening everyday security for women requires legal reactions to violence against women and the fostering of communal responsibility and attitudes consistent with women's safety and mobility.

Women who take lead roles in politics, civil society or business are at particular risk. Flexible and adaptive responses that maximize their security are needed.

Maintain a countrywide, accessible, network of women's shelters that maximize security for clients. Raise awareness and address public attitudes toward shelters.

ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Continue to expand massively the number of women teachers, at all levels of education and with particular attention to rural areas, to build on the achievements since 2001. Women in teaching positions lower the threshold for female attendance and serve as role models.

Develop effective, and sensitive, mechanisms to counter in harassment in educational institutions and in the work place, such as codes of conduct and complaints mechanisms.

The curriculum at all levels should be audited and developed to promote women's empowerment and respect for rights. The curriculum is a tool for ending harassment, gender-based violence and discrimination by promoting attitudinal change among boys and men.

Increase investments, not only in basic, but also in higher education. While the number of girls in schools has increased from almost none to around four million since 2001, the number of women in higher education has increased relatively less. The lack of dormitories for women students is the biggest bottleneck.

Since more than 80% of women are illiterate and innumerate, alphabetization campaigns have a major impact and are necessary counter the projected rise in illiteracy rates.

Community-Based Schools show good results on recruiting and retaining women teachers and providing education for girls, and merit consideration where regular schools are not established.

Establish a university specialization in gender studies.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Women who pursue careers as professionals or in business meet a number of obstacles. Mentoring and coaching arrangements are important.

Successful establishment of women-run businesses require a long-term support for skills education, market analysis and access and export certification.

Identify women's existing economic contributions through survey work and develop policies to empower women in these sectors.

OVERARCHING ISSUES

Ministry of Women's Affairs plays an important role. There is potential in strengthening the position and capacity of MOWA to mandate and to monitor policies and budgets throughout government. Strengthening MoWA should complement not preclude other measures.

The competent women's civil society groups is a major asset. The government plans to consult them in all political and legal processes and has appointed a Gender Advisory Board.

Strengthen research and analytical capacity within Afghan women's organizations, in order to bolster the knowledge basis of their policy suggestions, lobbying, and monitoring.

Follow up the proposal of an independent commission on the status of women, reporting to the president, along the model of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, to provide oversight of policies and budgets.

Fund and monitor implementation of the National Action Plans on Women and UNSR 1325.

Involve religious leaders and communities.

Strengthen international support for women's rights and empowerment in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and Afghan civil society groups.

FOLLOW-UP

Ensure that the renewal of mutual commitments between the Government of Afghanistan and development partners, to be discussed at the London Conference on Afghanistan and the Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul in 2015, includes specific Afghan and donor commitments that address the above challenges and recommendations. Institutionalize a bi-annual high-level meeting on women to take stock and sustain support.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway
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